WHAT OTA IS
WHAT OTA DOES
HOW OTA WORKS

CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES
Office of Technology Assessment
Washington, D.C. 20510

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Office of Technology Assessment (OTA)

WHAT OTA IS

OTA is a nonpartisan analytical support agency which serves the United States Congress by providing objective analysis of major public policy issues related to scientific and technological change. (See pg. 5)

WHAT OTA DOES

OTA works directly with and for the committees of Congress, providing them with detailed analyses of technological issues and responding to specific questions based on that analysis. (See p. 7)

HOW OTA WORKS

OTA's multidisciplinary staff plans, directs, and drafts all assessments. It draws extensively on the broad technical and professional resources of the private sector, including universities, research organizations, industry, and public interest groups. (See p. 8).

Excerpt From Technology Assessment Act of 1972
Public Law 92-484, 92d Congress, H.R. 10243
October 13, 1972

"FINDINGS AND DECLARATION OF PURPOSE

SEC. 2. The Congress hereby finds and declares that:

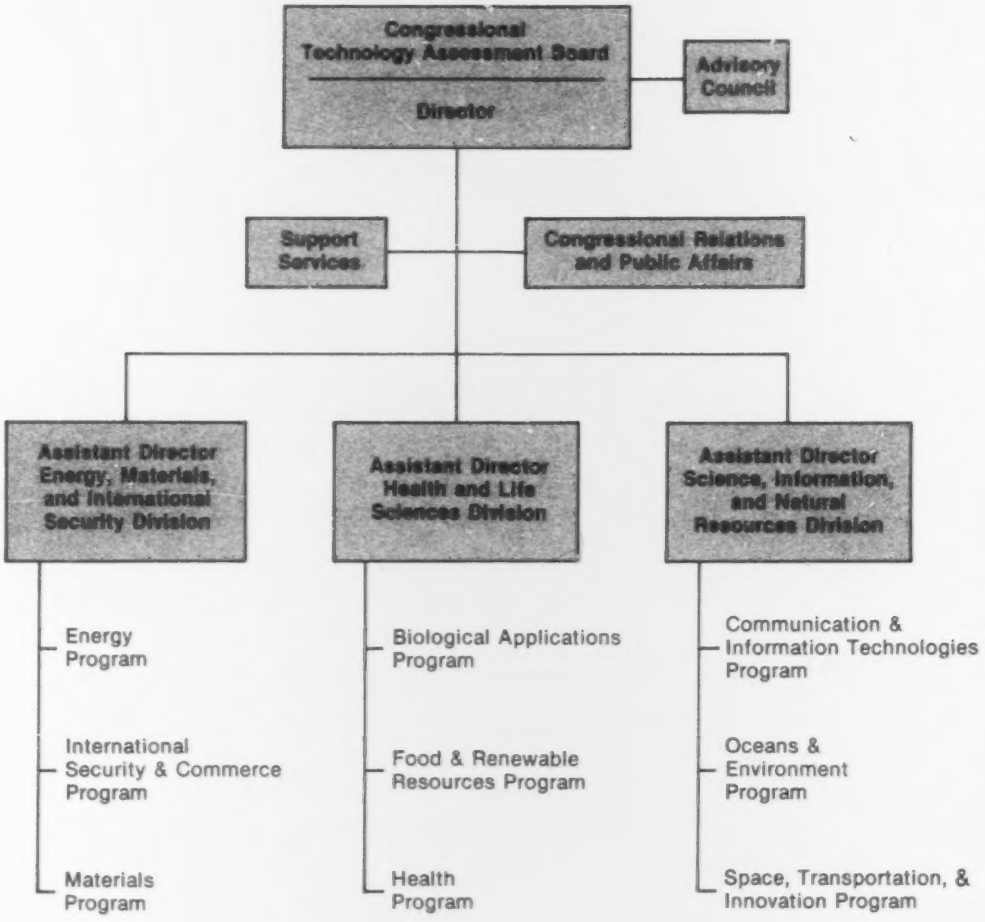
(a) As technology continues to change and expand rapidly, its applications are—

(1) large and growing in scale; and

(2) increasingly extensive, pervasive, and critical in their impact, beneficial and adverse, on the natural and social environment.

(b) Therefore, it is essential that, to the fullest extent possible, the consequences of technological applications be anticipated, understood, and considered in determination of public policy on existing and emerging national problems."

OTA ORGANIZATION CHART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WHAT OTA IS

The Organization

The Congressional Board

A 12-member bipartisan congressional board—six Senators and six Representatives—governs OTA. Board Members are appointed by the President pro tempore of the Senate and the Speaker of the House, respectively. A Chairman and Vice Chairman are elected by the Board. These posts alternate between the Senate and House in succeeding Congresses. The Vice Chairman is traditionally a member of the party opposite that of the Chairman. (Current Board Members are listed on the inside front cover.)

The Council

An Advisory Council of 10 public members eminent in science, technology, and education, appointed by the Board, advises the Board on OTA assessments and other matters. The Comptroller General of the United States and the Director of the Congressional Research Service of the Library of Congress are also members.

The Director

The Director is appointed by the Board and serves as a nonvoting member. He has full authority and responsibility for organizing and managing OTA's resources according to Board policies.

The Staff

OTA has a relatively small, in-house staff of 80 to 90 professionals whose skills span the spectrum of physical, life, and social sciences; engineering; law; and medicine.

The Task

OTA's job is to provide congressional committees with objective analyses of the emerging, difficult, and often highly technical issues of the late 20th century. It explores complex issues involving science and technology, helping Congress to resolve uncertainties and conflicting claims, identifying alternative policy options, and providing foresight or early alert to new developments which could have important implications for future Federal policy. OTA does not advocate particular policies or actions, but points out their pros and cons and sorts out the facts.

Technology Issues

A growing number of major issues of congressional concern—energy, environment, natural resources, national security, health, agriculture, telecommunications, transportation, world trade—are complex, highly technical, involve long-range impacts, and contain social and economic factors.

Take, for example, the issue of long-term energy sources. After three decades of lessening reliance on coal, growing dependence on gas and oil, and continued major public investment in nuclear power, our Nation still has no definitive plan of action to provide a transition over the next several decades to an energy use and supply system that is economically sensible, environmentally acceptable, and sustainable over a long period of time. The security and economic future of our Nation probably depend more heavily on energy than on any single resource. In making decisions on national energy policy, Congress must examine and assess an intricate array of technical realities and uncertainties, scientific knowledge, economic tradeoffs, social values and perceptions of risk and equity, and political judgments and tradeoffs.

During the 1960's, Congress found that failure to consider the complexity, cost, breadth, and long-term implications of technology led to policy decisions that were sometimes inappropriate, ineffective, or worse. In deciding such issues, Congress was all too often forced to rely on inadequate, conflicting, and biased information from outside sources. In 1972, after a long series of studies and hearings, Congress authorized the establishment of OTA as a congressional source of information and analysis that is nonpartisan, expert, objective, and anticipatory.

In the 1980's, OTA stands as the primary agency of Congress charged with analyzing the influence of science and technology on society and the implications for Federal policy. OTA's current subject areas cover numerous large-scale, complex, and sophisticated technologies. Its work includes both classified and unclassified analyses of issues dealing with national security, technology transfer, international trade, health, energy and material resources, wastes, air and water, agriculture, and new developments such as biotechnology and programmable automation.

WHAT OTA DOES

Assessment Requests and Approvals

According to the OTA act, requests for OTA assessments may be made by the chairman of any congressional committee acting alone, or at the request of a ranking minority member, or a majority of committee members; by the OTA Board; or by the OTA Director, in consultation with the Board.

The Board decides whether or not OTA will undertake a requested assessment. First, the OTA staff analyzes the request to determine what resources and time it might require and what modifications it might need to suit OTA's resources and congressional needs. The staff then presents a formal proposal to the Board, which makes the final decision.

OTA Studies and Proposals

The bulk of OTA's work centers on comprehensive, indepth assessments that may take up to 2 years to complete. OTA also draws upon its studies and current work to provide a variety of shorter responses to meet immediate congressional needs, such as briefings, testimony and interim reports. These timely responses to committees are based on data in current and past assessments. For example, OTA was requested to conduct an assessment on nonnuclear industrial hazardous waste, but committee legislative actions on hazard classification, one of several related issues included in the full report, was expected to be resolved before the assessment could be completed. Consequently, a committee requested a preliminary report on hazard classification, and in reponse, OTA testified on the subject and issued a technical memorandum on classifying for hazard management.

In other instances, OTA may provide brief, topical "spinoffs" from earlier assessments—such as an analysis of Federal policies affecting coal exports and port development, using previously published reports on the subject of domestic coal production and utilization as its background. OTA also can structure longer range assessments so that the results, in various stages, can be sent to Congress in the form of interim reports.

In order to assure that OTA's work is responsive to the congressional agenda, OTA provides advice to committee members and staff, presents testimony at hearings, conducts workshops, and provides interim reports based on its ongoing assessments. This close working relationship with committees is the foundation on which the unique value of OTA as a resource to the Congress is built.

HOW OTA WORKS

Program Teams

The OTA staff consists of skilled professionals with advanced training primarily in the physical, life, and social sciences, and engineering. The OTA staff is organized into nine program areas: energy; international security and commerce; materials; food and renewable resources; health; biological applications; communication and information technologies; oceans and environment; and space, transportation, and innovation.

These program teams conduct specific assessments, working closely with congressional committee staff. The team develops the overall study plan, performs research, identifies, enlists, and works with the appropriate contractors and consultants, analyzes and integrates their work, and develops the final report. In cases where the subject spans more than one program, a team of professionals from these areas is created.

Panels

Throughout each project, OTA uses advisory panels of experts on a particular subject as a way of ensuring that reports are objective, fair, and authoritative. Such panels include not only distinguished scientists and engineers, but also affected and interested parties from labor, industry, the academic community, public interest groups, State and local government, and the citizenry at large. These panels help to shape OTA studies by defining them initially and critiquing them while in process, and reviewing the reports before they are released.

Private Sector Involvement

The private sector is heavily involved in OTA studies as a source of expertise and perspectives while an assessment is in progress. Contractors and consultants are drawn from industry, universities, private research organizations, and public interest groups.

OTA also works to ensure that the views of the public are fairly reflected in its assessments. It involves the public in many ways—through advisory panels, workshops, surveys, and formal and informal public meetings. These interactions help OTA to identify and take into account contrasts between the perspectives of technically trained and lay citizens.

Release of Reports

After a completed assessment has been approved by the Director, copies of the formal report are sent to the Technology Assessment Board for its review and authorization for release. If a majority of the Board does not object, the report is forwarded to the requesting committee(s), summaries are sent to all Members of Congress, and then the report is released to the public. OTA assessments are published by the Government Printing Office and are frequently reprinted by commercial publishers.

Research Coordination

OTA works with the other congressional support agencies—the Congressional Budget Office, the Congressional Research Service of the Library of Congress, and the General Accounting Office—in an interagency Research Notification System. Its purpose is to coordinate activities and exchange information to avoid duplication of effort. Representatives of each organization meet regularly, and biweekly status reports are published in a central directory of congressional research activity.

Similarly, OTA stays in touch not only with the published work of analysts and researchers in Federal agencies and throughout the country, but also with their current activities. Thus, OTA can frequently obtain valuable unpublished information.

Studies in Progress (as of 1983)

Industrial Energy Use
Strategic Responses to an Extended Oil Disruption
Potential U.S. Natural Gas Availability
The Future of Conventional Nuclear Power
Wood: The Material, The Resource
Technologies To Reduce U.S. Materials Import Vulnerability
Strategic Command, Control, Communications, and Intelligence Systems
International Cooperation and Competition in Civilian Space Activities
Technology Transfer to the Middle East
Water-Related Technologies for Sustaining Agriculture in U.S. Arid and Semiarid Lands
Technologies To Sustain Tropical Forest Resources
Plants: The Potentials for Extracting Protein, Medicines, and Other Useful Chemicals
Evaluation of Veterans Administration Agent Orange Protocol
Health and Safety Control Technologies in the Workplace
Medical Technology and Costs of the Medicare Program
The Medical Devices Industry
Comparative Assessment of the Commercial Development of Biotechnology
Impact of Technology on Aging in America
Information Technology, Automation, and the Workplace
The Patent System and Its Impact on New Technological Enterprises
Assessment of Approaches to Wetlands Use
Airport System Development
Impact of Clinical Trials on Medical Practice and Health Policy

(NOTE: For brief descriptions of these studies in progress—see OTA booklet on "Assessment Activities"—available from OTA's Publishing Office, 224-8996.)

Global Models, World Futures, and Public Policy
A Critique
REVIEW OF THE FAA 1982 NATIONAL AIRSPACE SYSTEM PLAN
Informational Technology and Its Impact on American Education
TECHNOLOGY AND NDICAPPED PEOPLE
Implications of Electronic Mail and Message Systems for the U.S. Postal Service
SPACE SCIENCE RESEARCH IN THE UNITED STATES
PORT AND TRAFFIC NTROL SYSTEM
Energy Efficiency of Buildings in Cities
INCREASED AUTOMOBILE FUEL EFFICIENCY AND SYNTHETIC FUELS
CIVILIAN SPACE POLICY AND APPLICATIONS
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Some Completed OTA Assessments and Technical Memorandums

ENERGY, MATERIALS, AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY DIVISION

Industrial and Commercial Cogeneration—Examines the role that cogenerators could play in providing electric and thermal energy for industrial and commercial facilities.

Increased Automobile Fuel Efficiency and Synthetic Fuels: Alternatives for Reducing Oil Imports—Assesses increased automobile fuel efficiency and synthetic fuels production with respect to their potential to reduce conventional oil consumption, and their costs and impacts.

Energy Efficiency of Buildings in Cities—Focuses on the interaction of technology and policy for new and existing buildings in U.S. cities for the next two decades.

Solar Power Satellite Systems—Assesses the potential advantages, shortcomings, and impacts of solar satellite systems.

Nuclear Powerplant Standardization—Provides the essential background material for a broad understanding of the nuclear industry, its institutions and their relationship to standardization.

The Future of Liquefied Natural Gas Imports—Evaluates projected U.S. demand, global availability, cost and financing, and security of foreign supplies.

Energy From Biological Processes—Evaluates the energy potential of plant and animal matter.

Conservation and Solar Energy Programs of the Department of Energy—Analyzes the progress and direction of five major conservation and solar energy programs of the U.S. Department of Energy.

Residential Energy Conservation—Examines the prospects of existing and new technologies for reducing energy consumption in homes.

The Direct Use of Coal: Prospects and Problems of Production and Combustion—Assesses the prospects as well as the environmental, health, safety, and other problems of mining and burning significantly more coal than at present.

Application of Solar Technology to Today's Energy Needs—Evaluates the economic, technical, and environmental impacts of solar energy systems located at the point of use.

A Technology Assessment of Coal Slurry Pipelines—Compares the cost of transporting coal by slurry pipelines to rail for certain routes.

Technology and Soviet Energy Availability—Analyzes and identifies various levels of availability of U.S. and other Western energy technology and examines the impact on Soviet energy production to 1990.

MX Missile Basing—Assesses the technical feasibility, strategic utility, cost, impact on the region, and future consequences of various MX-basing modes.

U.S. Industrial Competitiveness: A Comparison of Steel, Electronics, and Automobiles—Extends OTA's efforts in the study of industrial competitiveness to a cross-industry comparison.

Taggants in Explosives—Assesses the technical feasibility, safety ramifications, costs, and law enforcement utility of a proposal to require that commercial explosives be manufactured with "identification and detection taggants."

Technology and East-West Trade—Examines the economic, military, and political implications of technology tranfer to the Communist world.

The Effects of Nuclear War—Examines the social, economic, political, and health effects of various levels of nuclear attacks on the United States and the Soviet Union.

Technologies and Management Strategies for Hazardous Waste Control—Presents the analyses, findings, and conclusions of the study on the Federal program for the management of nonnuclear industrial hazardous waste.

An Assessment of Development and Production Potential of Federal Coal Leases—Analyzes all mining activities, examines present and potential development value, estimates revenues to the Federal Government and deep-mining feasibility on Federal leases.

Technology and Steel Industry Competitiveness—Assesses how and when new technology can improve the international competitiveness of the U.S. steel industry.

An Assessment of Oil Shale Technologies—Assesses the status and potential of technologies for the development of oil shale resources.

Technical Options for Conservation of Metals: Case Studies of Selected Metals and Products—Explores the kinds and amounts of waste that occur in our use of eight critical metals.

Materials and Energy From Municipal Waste: Resource Recovery and Recycling From Municipal Solid Waste and Beverage Container Deposit Legislation—Examines present and potential technologies for producing energy and recovering resources from municipal solid waste.

Management of Fuel and Nonfuel Minerals in Federal Land—Analyzes Federal laws and practices that govern the exploration, development, and production of fuel and nonfuel minerals in onshore Federal Lands.

Analysis of Laws Governing Access Across Federal Lands: Options for Access in Alaska—Analyzes laws, regulations, and policies affecting access across federally owned lands to minerals on non-Federal lands.

Nonnuclear Industrial Waste: Classifying for Hazard Management: A Technical Memorandum—Reviews the nature and magnitude of hazardous waste disposal.

World Petroleum Availability: A Technical Memorandum—Examines prospects for world oil supplies and production during the next two decades.

Gasohol: A Technical Memorandum—Discusses the technology and economics of gasohol production.

HEALTH AND LIFE SCIENCES DIVISION

Impacts of Applied Genetics: Micro-Organisms, Plants, and Animals—Examines the application of classical and molecular genetic technologies to micro-organisms, plants, and animals.

World Population and Fertility Planning Technologies: The Next 20 Years—Examines how Government policies and programs view planned birth technologies, and how new international population assistance has changed world population growth in the last 20 years.

Impacts of Technology on U.S. Cropland and Rangeland Productivity—Examines the effects of presently used technologies on the capacity of cropland and rangeland resource base to sustain high levels of production.

U.S. Food and Agricultural Research—Analyzes the scientific base for establishing national, regional, and local research problems and the role of Federal, State, and private institutions in solving these problems.

Environmental Contaminants in Food—Discusses the different types and sources of chemical and radioactive contaminants in food.

Pest Management Strategies in Crop Protection—Reviews the array of tactics currently used to control agricultural pests.

Open Shelf-Life Dating of Food—Addresses the practicality, benefits, and costs of open shelf-life dating of food products.

Drugs in Livestock Feed—Analyzes the use of antibacterial and other drugs to promote growth and prevent disease in livestock.

Nutrition Research Alternatives—Evaluates alternative strategies to redirect Federal research toward examining the relationship between nutrition and the changing health problems of Americans.

Organizing and Financing Basic Research To Increase Food Production—Evaluates alternative methods for organizing and funding basic research in the biological sciences.

Perspectives on Federal Retail Food Grading—Assesses the capability of the current food grading system used by the Federal Government.

Postmarketing Surveillance of Prescription Drugs—Describes the drug approval process, the history, objectives, and current activities in postmarketing surveillance.

Medical Technology Under Proposals To Increase Competition in Health Care—Focuses on proposals for increased cost sharing by patients and greater competition among plans.

Strategies for Medical Technology Assessment—Examines the appropriateness and validity of existing assessment methods, such as controlled clinical trials, epidemiological studies, and consensus exercises.

Technology and Handicapped People—Provides information on general issues, such as the state of the art of evaluating efficacy, safety, and cost.

Cost-Effectiveness Analysis of Inactivated Influenza Vaccine—Examines the cost effectiveness of influenza vaccine.

Assessment of Technologies for Determining Cancer Risks From the Environment—Examines four major issues: estimates of the percentage of cancer due to environmental exposure, technologies used to test for carcinogenicity, methods used for extrapolating data from animals to humans, and regulatory pathways for controlling carcinogens.

The Implications of Cost-Effectiveness Analysis of Medical Technology—Analyzes the feasibility, implications, and usefulness of cost-effectiveness analysis and cost-benefit analysis in health care decisionmaking.

Forecasts of Physician Supply and Requirements—Analyzes the assumptions, methods, and conclusions of the technologies for forecasting both the need for and supply of physicians by specialty and geographical distribution.

A Review of Selected Federal Vaccine and Immunization Policies Based on Case Studies of Pneumococcal Vaccine—Analyzes Federal policies related to four areas of vaccine and immunization activities.

Selected Topics in Federal Health Statistics—Examines data systems used in Federal health programs and offers alternatives for their effective management.

Assessing the Efficacy and Safety of Medical Technologies—Evaluates the need for assessments of the efficacy and safety of medical technologies before they go into widespread use.

Policy Implications of the Computed Tomography (CT) Scanner—Analyzes issues such as efficacy, health planning, use, and financing arising from the widespread adoption of the CT scanner.

Policy Implications of Medical Information Systems—Examines the potential of computer-based medical information systems.

Cancer Testing Technology and Saccharin—Assesses the capacity of current testing methodology to predict the carcinogenic potential of chemicals consumed by humans.

Development of Medical Technology: Opportunities for Assessment—Examines the need for assessing the potential social impacts of emerging medical technologies while they are being developed.

Technology Transfer at the National Institutes of Health: A Technical Memorandum—Presents general information on biomedical R&D and its relationship to technology transfer, and on the processes of transferring medical technology and of assessing that technology.

Compensation for Vaccine-Related Injuries: A Technical Memorandum—Reviews the pros and cons of establishing a Federal vaccine injury compensation program.

SCIENCE, INFORMATION, AND NATURAL RESOURCES DIVISION

Informational Technology and Its Impact on American Education—Examines the issues relating to the educational applications of the new information technologies.

Radiofrequency Use and Management: Impacts From the World Administrative Radio Conference of 1979—Reviews the U.S. preparations for and participation in WARC-79, identifies its major results and projects their impacts.

Computer-Based National Information Systems: Technology and Public Policy Issues—Summarizes and analyzes three U.S. information systems: National Crime Information Center of the FBI, electronic message systems, and electronic funds transfer.

Alternatives for a National Computerized Criminal History System—Assesses the use and operation of computerized criminal history systems by Federal law enforcement agencies.

Implications of Electronic Mail and Message Systems for the U.S. Postal Service—Evaluates the impact of electronic message systems (EMS) on operations of the U.S. Postal Service and assesses alternative roles for the Postal Service in provision of EMS and services.

Patent-Term Extension and the Pharmaceutical Industry—Examines the benefits and efficacy of pharmaceutical innovation and research and development.

The Feasibility and Value of Broadband Communications in Rural Areas: A Preliminary Evaluation—Examines the issues involved in using communication technologies—such as cable television, ground- or satellite-based microwave links, and automatic broadcast repeater stations—to provide community services in rural areas.

Use of Models for Water Resources Management, Planning, and Policy—Evaluates methodologies, findings, and implications of Global 2000 and other global modeling studies.

Technology and Oceanography: An Assessment of Federal Technologies for Oceanographic Research and Monitoring—Identifies the technologies and management systems that are most effective in researching four areas: weather and climate, marine pollution, undersea mineral exploration, and fisheries.

Transportation of Liquefied Natural Gas—Evaluates the status and trends of ongoing and proposed projects involving the transportation and handling of liquefied natural gas.

Establishing a 200-Mile Fisheries Zone—Evaluates the problems and opportunities presented by the new 200-mile U.S. fishery zone.

Coastal Effects of Offshore Energy Systems—Assesses social, economic, and environmental impacts of three proposed offshore energy systems.

Review of FAA National Airspace System Plan—Critiques the FAA National Airspace System Plan.

Civilian Space Policy and Applications—Explores Federal involvement in space R&D, when and under what circumstances commercial involvement is appropriate.

Global Models, World Futures, and Public Policy—A Critique—Examines global models as a tool for long-range strategic analysis and policy development.

Airport and Air Traffic Control System—Examines the likely future evolution of domestic aviation.

Impact of Advanced Air Transport Technology—Examines the impact of introducing or not introducing advanced high-speed aircraft into our future commercial fleet.

Impact of Advanced Group Rapid Transit Technology—Examines second-generation automated guideway transit systems as part of a solution to the need for improved urban mass transit.

Changes in the Future Use and Characteristics of the Automobile Transportation System—Describes energy, environmental, safety, and cost impacts of technological changes.

An Evaluation of Railroad Safety—Evaluates trends in railroad-related accidents.

An Assessment of Community Planning for Mass Transit—Assesses the ways cities plan for mass transit.

An Assessment of Technology for Local Development—Assesses several prototype technologies, the local problems they may alleviate, and their feasibility and potential impacts.

Automation and the Workplace: Selected Labor, Education, and Training Issues: A Technical Memorandum—Presents concepts and background materials that are fundamental to the analysis of the labor, education, and training implications of programmable automation technology.

Space Science Research in the United States: A Technical Memorandum—Summarizes and critiques the views of many people interested in space science.

Coal Exports and Port Development: A Technical Memorandum—Addresses four major issues that are important to Federal policy debate: estimating the potential U.S. coal export market, development of foreign trade policy, the Federal role in dredging harbors, and the outlook for alternative technologies.

Ocean Margin Drilling: A Technical Memorandum—Evaluates a proposed public-private cooperative research effort in marine geology.

Recent Developments in Ocean Thermal Energy: A Technical Memorandum—Reviews status of ocean thermal energy conversion (OTEC) developments occurring after OTA's 1978 report on OTEC.

General Information

Contacts Within OTA

(OTA offices are located at 600 Pennsylvania Avenue, S.E., Washington, D.C.)

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Energy, Materials, and International Security Division	226-2253
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Publications	224-8996

Reports and Information

To obtain information on availability of published reports, studies, and summaries, call the OTA Publishing Office, 224-8996.

For information on the operation of OTA, the nature and status of ongoing assessments, or the general publications listed below, write or call:

Congressional Relations and Public Affairs Office
Office of Technology Assessment
U.S. Congress
Washington, D.C. 20510
(202) 226-2115

General OTA Publications

OTA Annual Report.—Details OTA's activities and summarizes reports published during the preceding year.

List of Publications.—Catalogs by subject area all of OTA's published reports with instructions on how to order them.

Report Briefs.—One-page summaries of OTA reports.

Press Releases.—Announce publication of reports, staff appointments, and other newsworthy activities.

OTA Brochure.—"What OTA Is. What OTA Does, How OTA Works."

Assessment Activities.—Contains brief descriptions of assessments presently under way, with estimated dates of completion.

Summaries of OTA Reports.—The summaries of most OTA reports published since late 1979 are available, at no cost, as separate, self-mailing booklets.

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